Circle of Trust

Created by:	Jesaja Senones
Based on:	Dr. Peggy McIntosh (Circle of Trust, 1989)
Date:	2025
Contact:	Jesaja Senones: Jesajasenones@outlook.com Dr Peggy: nationalseedproject@gmail.com

Purpose

Many people carry stories they never speak about: shame, violence, loss, psychological pain. In this exercise, we show that these experiences are shared. We make them visible and open to discussion within the group, without forcing anyone to speak.

By literally taking steps in response to personal questions, participants discover that they are not alone. The group sees: *"What I have experienced, others have experienced too."* This opens the door to conversation, recognition, and recovery.

This exercise helps to break stigma by making visible what often remains hidden, without words, yet with real impact.

Step-by-Step Plan

	Step:	**Instructions:**
1.	**Preparation:**	Find a neutral and spacious setting (indoors or outdoors), have the group stand in a large circle, create a safe atmosphere, and agree on the following ground rules: - Everything that happens here stays here. - Participation is voluntary. - We respond with respect and without judgement.
2	**Check-in:**	Give each participant the opportunity to say how they feel before the start.
3	**Exercise:**	**First say:** "I am going to read out a number of statements. If that statement is also true for you, take one step forward. Then step back again. We do not speak during this exercise. We will talk afterwards, but only when everyone is ready to do so." **Sample questions:** - Who has ever felt that they were "broken"? - Who has ever had therapy or an admission and kept it hidden for a long time?

		- Who has ever thought: I am not normal? - Who has ever been surprised by their own resilience? - Who has ever felt ashamed of a mental health diagnosis? - Who has ever remained silent because they thought: “They are not going to understand me anyway”? - Who has ever felt that asking for help was a weakness? - Who has ever felt judged by care professionals or loved ones? - Who dares to be more themselves today than before? - Who has ever shared their story and noticed that someone else recognised themselves in it? - Who has ever found support in an unexpected place or from an unexpected person? - Who has learned that vulnerability can also be a strength? - Who has ever experienced something that is now a source of wisdom? - Who has ever felt that decisions were made for them, without their input? - Who believes that service users and care professionals are stronger together than apart? - Who finds it important that experiential knowledge counts just as much as professional knowledge? - Who believes that care is more than just conversations and medication? - Who feels connected today to at least one person in this group? - Who wants to keep building a place where everyone matters? Between each question: allow 10 seconds of silence.
4	**Debriefing:**	**Preparation:** - Have participants stand or sit in a circle. - Place a stack of paper, pencils, colouring pencils, markers, or other creative materials (such as finger paint) in the middle. **Ask first:** - How was it to do this? - What did you feel or think during the activity? (Allow space here for brief answers or silence.) **Then continue with deeper reflection:** - What surprised you? - What did you discover about others in this group? - Do you feel differently towards the group than before? - Were there things you wanted to step forward for, but did not dare to? Why? **Important guideline:** - Encourage quiet moments between questions and allow reflection to breathe. - Emphasise that all experiences are welcome, without any pressure to share. **All forms of sharing are welcome (multi-method):**

		- Talking, but also a drawing, a song, a quotation, or a gesture. - You may also make or point to something instead of using words.
5	**Closing:**	Close with a check-out question: What do you take away from this moment?

Timeline

Preparation	5 – 10 minutes
Check-in	10 – 20 minutes
Exercise	20 – 30 minutes
Debriefing	30 – 60 minutes
Closing	5 – 10 minutes

Requirements

Materials:

What?:	**Quantity:**
List of questions.	Depending on the group/theme.
Optional: stack of paper, pencils, colouring pencils, markers, or other creative materials (such as finger paint).	Depending on the group/theme.

People / Facilitators:

At least one trained facilitator (care professional, coach, or educational staff member). This may be supplemented by an expert by experience or a therapist for further depth or follow-up support.

Location:

A neutral, quiet setting (indoors or outdoors), without too much distraction. Ensure there is enough space to move freely within the circle.

Evaluation

For facilitators: Debrief with any co-facilitator or colleague: What went well? What was difficult? What do we want to keep or adjust? Also pay attention to signs of emotional impact in participants, and provide follow-up if needed.